15

Ministerial Perplexities and Solaces:

CONVOCATION SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE CLERGY

OF THE

DELAWARE AND CHESTER CONVOCATION

IN THE DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA,

IN ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH, MARCUS HOOK, PA.,

On Wednesday, Nov. 16, 1853.

BY

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TO THE

REV. LEVI BULL, D. D.,

SENIOR PRESBYTER AND PRESIDENT,

AND TO

THE REVEREND BRETHREN, OF THE CONVOCATION,

WITH ALL

WHO WITH US SHARE, BY GOD'S ALLWISE PROVIDENCE,

"The Perplexities and Solaces of Ministerial Life,"

AS A TOKEN OF CHRISTIAN AND OFFICIAL FELLOWSHIP,

THIS SERMON,

PREACHED BY THEIR APPOINTMENT, AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS RESPECTFULLY

INSCRIBED.

"O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 8.

"We are perplexed, but not in despair."

In the passage of which these words form a part, the Apostle, with the pen of a master and the sunbeam of inspiration, draws, what might be aptly called, *the Daguerreotype and Paradox of Ministerial life*. His rich and ripe experience, first as a Disciple, and then as an Apostle of the Christian faith, entitles him to be heard and believed on such a subject. He was not a theorist and a novice, but a practised veteran in ministerial life. Familiar with all its lights and shades, he testified not from hearsay, but "spake that he did know and testified that he had seen." Compare, for instance, what the Acts of the Apostles record of his career, with the declarations of his epistles; recall his numberless trials; his "perils on land, his perils on sea, his perils in the wilderness, his perils among false brethren;" how for the faith and testimony of Jesus he was "in stripes, in bonds and imprisonments, in hunger and cold, in fasting and nakedness;" beset by the Pharisees who hated him as an Apostate; persecuted by the heathens as "a setter forth of strange gods;" mobbed at Athens, stoned at Lystra, "fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus;" annoyed *in* the Church by

the schemes of false teachers and the inconsistencies of disciples, and outside of it by the intrigues of schismatics; persecuted by "the powers that be," because "slanderously reported" as a "mover of seditions;" often escaping only with his life; anon, think of him as "the Apostle of the Gentiles," and "the Bishop of the flock whereof the Holy Ghost had made him overseer;" burthened "with the care of all the churches;" at Ephesus braving the rage of the silversmiths; at Corinth stemming the tide of schism and immorality; here obliged to admonish the unruly; there to discipline the notorious offender; at one time, to "stop the mouths of gainsayers," and at another to speak "for the edifying of the body of Christ;" at all times engaged in an inward warfare between "the law of the mind" and the "law of the members bringing him into captivity;" moreover, as the herald of a new religion, obliged to come into sharp and frequent collision with the prejudices, corruptions and spirit of the age; forsaken by friends, surrounded by foes, stung by ingratitude, chilled by disappointment, how arduous was his work! At the same time, the *Apostle* did not swallow up the *man*. "Of like passions with others," the fear of man, the love of ease, the hope of preferment, tempted his carnal nature to betray Christ and his cause.

Surely, in a field of ministerial duty and trial so vast, unpromising and sterile; surrounded by "Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free;" with a conscience tenderly alive to duty and utterly discarding the modern doctrine of "expediency," nor prepared to act upon the maxim that "the end sanctifies the means;"—"fightings without, and fears within"—St. Paul might well speak of "PERPLEXITIES."

But his sorrows did not blind him to his SOLACES! If his ministry had its trials, it also had its joys. He could "thank God, who had counted him worthy to be put in trust with the gospel." He could "magnify his office." If he found himself in a labyrinth of cares and sorrows, he found a sure guide in the promise: "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and receive me to glory." If men forsook and friends betrayed, he had the assurance of the Master, "*Lo, I am with you always.*" Whatever might be his perplexities, "the Lord delivered him out of them all." Duty—truth—fidelity to God and man—the Saviour's Cross and Judgment-Throne, these were the fixed stars by which he shaped his course, both ministerial and Christian.

Can we wonder, that thus with honor to his Master, with credit to himself, and everlasting blessings to his race, he should have safely passed through all perplexities, and at last, with an "innumerable company" for "seals of his ministry and crowns of his rejoicing," should have "finished his course with joy and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus?" "*His heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord.*" Who can wonder, that though often "*perplexed,*" St. Paul was never "*in despair?*"

Beloved Brethren in the Ministry of Grace, I am certain of your cordial sympathy in the selection and discussion of this subject; one that, stamped with the seal of individual experience, "comes home to the business and bosoms of all." We cannot have been in earnest in our holy calling as Teachers, Guides, Examples, Pastors, Counsellors, without having more or less shared St. Paul's "perplexities." Happy for us if we have shared his

solaces, and in view of both are ready to exclaim with him: "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*"

Who of us does not herein recognize the Daguerreotype and Paradox of his own Ministerial Life, its light and shade, and its apparent contradiction. We shall need "the mind of the Spirit," to apprehend them. To *the world*, "they are foolishness." To the "*novice*" they are of ominous and forbidding aspect. To the "*hireling*" prophesying "for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread," they are most unintelligible fancies. But in the experience of *every sober, earnest-minded minister of Christ* and steward of God's mysteries, they will prove stern and sober realities. We can neither too often nor too closely contemplate them, that we may know where lies our weakness and our strength, our danger and our safety; that, amidst the labyrinth of life, where path traverses path, and guide conflicts with guide, we may pursue the path of duty—ever narrow, ever safe—and "save both ourselves and them that hear us."

Met as a band of brethren—heralds of "the common salvation"—with common trials and for common sympathy and counsel, we shall find it, I trust, neither inappropriate nor unprofitable, to meditate upon the theme suggested by the Text. I shall have fully attained my object, if by what I may say in its discussion, we shall be induced, in all our trials, believingly, exultingly to say with St. Paul: "WE ARE PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR."

Frankly acknowledging in the outset, that there are those among you, Brethren, whose riper age and richer

ministerial experience would enable them to speak much more fully—with the power and unction of "Paul the aged" to the youthful Timothy, than a youth in years and a comparative "novice" in office, I shall rely more on the intrinsic truthfulness and interest of the subject, than on any novelty of statement or force of argumentation on my part, to interest your attention.

Nor let the LAITY here present, forget that this matter has a practical interest for them: aye, "much, every way." *Our* perplexity should awaken *their* prayers, *their* sympathies, *their* co-operation, *their* love, *their* candour and forbearance. If, brethren of the household of faith, we can secure these, we shall be all the better prepared to say with the Apostle: "We are perplexed, but not in despair."

Our Convocation Theme then, is,
"MINISTERIAL PERPLEXITIES AND SOLACES:"
and we purpose briefly to set forth:

I. *Our Perplexities*, and

II. *Our Solaces.*

And may He, "without whom nothing is strong and nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us His mercy, that He being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that finally we lose not the things Eternal."

I. We begin, therefore, with *our Ministerial Perplexities:* those difficulties, neither few nor small, which beset our path as *Teachers*, *Pastors*, *Counsellors*, *Examples*—in *such a Church*, in *such a country*, *such an age*, and *among such a people, as ours.* "Their name is Legion." They vary with age, and temper, and location. But *no* location,

temper, age, is exempt from them. The distinguished City Rector and the humble Country Parson have their troubles, "each after its kind, and bearing seed in itself." We cannot, of course, within the limits of a sermon, enter into their Protean and multiform varieties: we shall content ourselves with general remarks and strongly drawn outlines, leaving you, Brethren, to fill up the picture with such colours as experience may supply. We place in the front rank,

1. *Our perplexities as Religious Teachers, as Heralds of such a Gospel, to such a Race, as ours.* Isaiah, the son of Amoz, inspired as he was, felt these: "And the voice said, Cry; and I said, What shall I cry?" From his day to ours, how various, how contradictory have been the answers to this question! Rome and Oxford; Wittenberg and Geneva; Cambridge and Westminster;—and all the Babel of modern Sectdom, have each their answers ready; and are each so eager to be heard as almost to make it impossible to hear "what is piped or harped." Rationalism and Sacramentalism—Formalism and Spiritualism—Mysticism and Fanaticism, cry with one consent: "Lo, here is Christ, lo, there!" Of course in such a state of things, the question is far from being solved, by the very common but most indefinite prescription: "Preach the *Gospel!*" "Wo, indeed, be unto us, if we preach not the Gospel!" But now, as in Saint Paul's time, there are "OTHER GOSPELS" current, besides that only one, which comes to us stamped with the image of "Christ Crucified" and the superscription, "Holiness unto the Lord;" which teaches us, that "we are saved by grace, through faith, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; and not of works, lest any man should boast." "False Christs

and false prophets have gone out into the world." Human nature, corrupt and blind at best, craves other and more congenial teaching than that which "hath its fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." Now, as of old, "there are those which trouble us and pervert the Gospel of Christ," regardless alike of Apostolic anathema and Divine retribution. Now, as of old, "the Jews seek a sign, the Greeks ask for wisdom." The religious world fairly *hisses* with the sounds of "*Sh*ibboleth" and "*S*ibboleth:" an endless multiplicity of creeds has left multitudes no creed at all. Babel has risen in Jerusalem. But waiving this source of ministerial perplexity, and taking the Gospel in its most general aspect, as viewed by all true Christians: viewing it *as a plain and unreserved proclamation of free pardon through Christ to all guilty, repentant and believing sinners;* and subsequently as *a stringent call to holiness and self-denial upon ransomed and forgiven penitents;* how perplexing does this make our office; how unwelcome our exposure of the vileness and deceitfulness of the human heart, and the utter worthlessness of human merit! My brethren of the Clergy, who is there among us, that has not often through the week, when "the voice said, Cry," anxiously responded: "What shall I cry?" and stood, at times, fairly bewildered amidst the dissonant responses coming "like the sound of many waters," from formalist and mystic, from pulpit epicures and "itching ears," from careless sleeper and orthodox precision? Who has not felt perplexed as to *what* to preach, and *when*, and *how* to preach—how to tune the trumpet, so as to "waken the sleeper, to rouse the careless, to comfort the penitent, to recover the backslider, to alarm the formalist; to strengthen the diseased, to heal that

which was sick—to bind up that which was broken—to bring again that which was driven away—to seek that which was lost;"*—to stir the dead in trespasses and sins by "the terrors of the Lord," or heal the broken-hearted by the "love of Christ which passeth knowledge?" Which of us has not been perplexed between the claims of that fidelity which can say to David, "Thou art the man," and that fear of offence, which "calleth evil good, and good evil?" Some of our flock are indulging in conduct or pursuits or amusements, perilous to their Christian name and a good conscience. We are sure, they ought to be warned. We know what is written of the "watchman" and the "sword." But we hesitate; we temporize; we fear to give offence; nay, as the poet saith:

"We court a *grin*, where we should woo a *soul*."

We speak delicately and mince matters, and "sow pillows to all arm-holes." Thus did not Elijah before Ahab, nor Nathan before David, nor John before Herod. With all these, "bitter" was "bitter," and "sweet" was "sweet." We are, of course, never to give *needless* offence. We are to be "gentle for Christ's sake;" and never to forget, that now, as in Elijah's day, God is not always "in the whirlwind and the fire," but often "in the still small voice." Yet wo be to us, if we be "as some who handle the word of God deceitfully." *The best way, after all, to deal with difficult characters and perplexing subjects, is a straight-forward, plain, and honest outspeaking of the heart.* Divine Wisdom has given the simplest rule of Christian Homiletics: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; but he that hath my

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* Ezekiel xxxiv. 40.

word, let him speak my word FAITHFULLY, saith the Lord." Calling things by their right names, makes, after all, the shortest and best pulpit dictionary. Prophets—Apostles—Reformers—and more than these, the Master of them all—have set us the example: let us follow their footsteps. Ever be "the glorious gospel of the Blessed God," in its fullness and its freeness, in its benignity and mercy, our one great theme; never let us hesitate to "declare the whole counsel of God," for the sake of pleasing the stately courtesy of an Agrippa, or for fear of offending "ears polite" like those of Herod or Felix, King or Pope. Instead of catering to the dainty tastes of modern pulpit epicures, and the "itching ears" of a delicate generation, let us "feed the flock of God, whereof the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers," with "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Let our eyes look right on, nor our feet "turn to the right or to the left." Thus shall we unperplexed move on, guided by the never-erring oracle of God, and "save both ourselves and them that hear us."

2. But again: *Other ministerial perplexities arise from our position as examples.* How well the world in general understand that text: "Being examples unto the flock." And that other text: "Giving none offence, that the ministry be not blamed." And while, of other texts, which speak of laymen's duties and responsibilities, they often prove very lax interpreters, in *this* they are most rigid exegetes. How ready they are to misconstrue every innocent act; how slow, in our failures, to give us at least the credit of good intentions; how prompt, in our reproofs of their vices, to scent personal injury!

Yet, I pray you, Christian brethren, consider what we

are and what the Scripture saith of us and ministers in general. *Jeremiah* calls himself "a man of unclean lips." *Elijah* was "a man of like passions with us." *Moses*, the meekest of men, in anger broke the tables of the law. *St. Paul* "felt his spirit stirred within him, when he saw the whole city given to idolatry." Nay, JESUS HIMSELF, on one occasion, "looked round about upon the multitude with anger." Our investiture with the robes of office does not divest us of our human nature: it were sad, if it did. Nor is the matter much mended *by the infinite variety of pretensions that are put forth.* One takes offence because the clergyman studies too much, and visits too little; another because of the reverse. One deems him too plebian, another too aristocratic; one too prodigal and improvident, another too parsimonious and mean. To one he is too plain-spoken, to another too delicate and velvet-lipped. Now add to this *the keen, oppressive sense, which most clergymen have of their "often infirmities;"* and it is easy to understand how our course must often be sadly "perplexed;" how difficult it is for "every one of us to please his neighbor for good unto edification;" to say and do always, just what the time and place and circumstances require; and how needful it is that we should claim God's gracious promise: "I will guide thee with mine eye."

3. Again: Perplexities beset our path as LABOURERS. Like our Master, we are to "work the works of Him that sent us." But how various our work! How manifold the versatility of talent required for the conversion of sinners, "for the work of the ministry, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ!" *How difficult often the choice of a field;* how much more,

its cultivation; how unavailable and crooked often our *material!* What weary hours and anxious thought it often costs, how we may best reach such a mind; conciliate such a character; reclaim such a wanderer; gain the aged; win the young; clear away thorns from "ground nigh unto cursing;" remove certain stumbling blocks, and in short be "all things to all men." And then, how *unpromising often the particular spot, where God, in His providence, may have placed us;* or where, without His providence, we may have run without being sent; perhaps as barren as that of *St. John* on the bleak shores of the *Ægean Sea*, or of *Felix Neff* among the craggy cliffs of the "*Ban de la Roche;*" with little or no hopeful material to work upon; with no active and energetic help from parish officers and laity; with inveterate unchurchly and anti-churchly habits to reform; with "roots of bitterness" to eradicate; with the adverse influences of those to brave, who hate us for our Master's sake; arraying against us the promptings of gain, the bitterness of wounded pride, the rancour of an unforgiving spirit. And at best, *how discouraging the proportion between hopes and results, between effort and fruit;* how much we attempt, how little we accomplish! How often our best plans prove mortifying failures! All this is designed to try our faith and patience, and to remind us that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it," "*that the excellency of power might be of God and not of man.*" What with most heterogeneous material—"gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble:" compelled to DO much that had been left undone, or, which is often quite as difficult, to UNDO much that has been done: to encounter prejudice, misrepresentation and dog-

matism; to "burn brick" without clay or straw, perchance; expected to please everybody, and in the attempt, sure to please nobody; surely, "as labourers together with God," we do not lack for perplexities. WHAT—and WHEN—and HOW—and WHERE to work, so as most hopefully to bring about the great result: this is the one great problem of Ministerial life. Happy is he, who successfully solves it!

4. Again: "We are perplexed as SPIRITUAL ADVISERS AND COUNSELLORS; and in this perhaps more than in any other department of our duty. Men look to us for guidance in the weightiest of all concerns. If the Advocate misleads his client, he may ruin his fortune. If the Physician mis-advises his patient, he may destroy life. But if the Christian Minister misguides, he ruins that which is worth more than fortune, health, or life; he ruins *souls*. Men are blind, and bewildered, and need some one to guide them. But "if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch." Each age and sex, each business and profession, each character and circumstance in life, needs its peculiar and seasonable treatment. Consciences burthened with guilt; hearts oppressed with grief, or fear, or melancholy; minds disturbed by superstitious or fanatic fears; spirits slumbering in false security; trembling on the brink of the grave, or "recovering themselves from the snare of the devil;" the young in their self-confident unwariness; the middle aged engulphed in the whirlpool of business, care, or pleasure; the aged "with gray hairs here and there upon them, yet knowing it not;" the sick, the poor, the friendless, the sorrowful, the dying: all need consideration, sympathy and counsel; Felix as well as Agrippa; Lot's wife as well as "the house

of Onesiphorus." And all this advice to be given under the pressure of the solemn thought that the issue is for life or death, for heaven or hell! You have seen the *physician*, in a critical case, with deep concern pacing the room, pressing his hand to his forehead; you have seen the *lawyer*, in a difficult suit, anxiously consult his authorities: you have seen the *merchant*, threatened with bankruptcy, anxiously examine his books; but oh, what are the perplexities of all these combined, to that of him who feels, that

> "*Souls* are his charge: to him 'tis given
> To train them up for God and heaven."

Unutterably solemn, but ineffably perplexing also is the Minister's vocation as portrayed by Ezekiel (xxxiv. 40): "*Strengthening the diseased; healing that which was sick; binding up that which was broken; bringing again that which was driven away; seeking that which was lost.*"

In our *Pastoral* office we have to deal with every variety of character: the skeptical and the dogmatic; the ignorant and the conceited; the man of business and the man of pleasure; the refined and the vulgar; the wealthy and the poor; the politician and the lawyer; those who "DWELL in ceiled houses," and those who STAY in garrets and cellars. Moreover, we have to grapple with the perplexing and prominent questions which agitate the age; in the discussion of which "ignorance is often the mother of devotion," and in the management of which not unfrequently "a fool is more highly esteemed than seven men that can render a reason;" questions of social evil, of public education, crime, pauperism and ignorance; questions which, for weal or woe, deeply affect man's best interests, and which no Christian minister should either flippantly ignore, or lazily adjourn. It is plain, how dif-

ficult to a conscientious mind, such a situation must often prove, amidst the conflict which questions like these will ever call forth between duty and policy, the love of ease and a good conscience, the praise of God and the fear of man; and how much reason even now St. Paul's successors in the ministry have to be "perplexed," if not "in despair."

5. Once more: *Look at our position as ministers of such an age, in such a country, and in such a Church as ours: and you will find fresh cause for Ministerial Perplexity.* The spirit of the age is peculiar. It is one of *excitement*, but not always healthy; of *progress*, but not always in the right direction; of *change*, but not always for the better. Spiritually, though in a far different sense from Apostolic times, "Parthian, Mede, Elamite, Crete, and Arabian" are gathered at Jerusalem. Like *all* mushrooms, religious sectarism thrives well in American soil. Amidst this Babel, calm and quiet, neither dead nor asleep, stands THE CHURCH, a balance-wheel to keep the religious world from flying off its hinges; THE CHURCH, substantially "SEMPER EADEM" (ever the same); sober, not frigid; conservative, not retrograde; holding fast all the great doctrines of the gospel; her formularies most wisely leaving room for differences of opinion on nebulous and doubtful points, such as predestination, baptismal grace, and the stringency and essentiality of Episcopal government, ordinances and worship. Here lies at once her wisdom and her strength. *Situated as she is, her safety lies in a wise and moderate conservatism, firmly based on historic foundation;—equally remote from the puerilities of Popery and Puseyism, as well as the extravagances of modern sectdom.* This very circumstance, however, will sometimes perplex her ministry. *Within her own pale* those who take mod-

erate ground, (incontrovertibly the historic basis of the Reformed Church of England and America,) will sometimes, at either end of the line, encounter bigots, radicals, extreme men; men run church-mad; men of but one idea who will have "*Sh*ibboleth" or ecclesiastical decapitation. And then *as to those without*, we shall hear enough of cavil against our doctrine, polity and worship, supplying by insolence what is lacking in reason; calling us "bigots," exclusives; blending all sorts of hard names with all manner of soft arguments; finding it quite as convenient to forget history as to wound charity, and ignore the testimony of their own "burning and shining lights" as to the primitive existence of the Episcopal polity, and withal departing sadly from the teachings of those whom they (not inaptly) style "the FATHERS" of their Church.* And as to "*bigotry*," the charge is somewhat venturesome on the part of those, who are often exclusive when they find it convenient. It is plain, too, that *in many localities where the Church is yet to be planted, as in others where she has decayed and is to be revived, her path will be one of slow and difficult progress;* and her ministers will find perplexities enough. Inveterate prejudices; a loose tone of Churchmanship; neglected Church-training, and slovenly Church-habits, grown desperate by age, will often sorely try our wisdom and patience, and remind us that a little prevention is better than a great deal of cure.

6. Lastly: Our ministerial perplexities will often be augmented *by trials of a more tangible and material kind.* Parochial poverty in some instances, or quite as often,

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* See "Old fashioned Presbyterian views of the Ministry and Sacraments;" a Tract recently published by Stanford & Swords, New York, 1853.

Parochial parsimony in others, will sometimes neglect to enable us to "provide things honest in the sight of all men;" compelling us to distract the time due to prayers and study and parochial duty, with working out by some other than "the Rule of Three" or "Vulgar Fractions," the problem how to meet the claims of $1200 or $1500 a year on a salary of $1000; or those of $600 or $800, on a pittance of $200 or $300. We know full well that it is neither needful nor desirable that clergymen and their families should "dwell in ceiled houses," or "be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day." We grant that they should be the last to exemplify the pomp and pride of life. But, surely, if the world has a right to expect us to "owe no man anything," the Church whom we serve, is bound to enable us to do so. It is a sadly mistaken policy which compels so many of our ablest clergy to resort to all sorts of extra-clerical and unclerical expedients to "*eke out*"—aye, "*eke* out" (there could not be a more *expressive* word) "their means of living;" which drives them, "one to his farm and another to his merchandize," and another to his quill to write for bread, and "supply men's lack of service towards them," and that too in these days, when by a most perverse Parochial Arithmetic, salaries decrease in proportion as provisions rise. O, if some of our wealthy laity, who "dwell in ceiled houses," and "have bread enough and to spare," could witness all the shifts and turns to which poor country curates and their wives are driven, to "make" (in homely but expressive phrase) "two ends meet," they would more truly sympathize with us, "not merely in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." They would realize something of the poor Clergyman's feelings, when looking forward to age, infir-

mity and death, he finds himself summoned to trust the Lord's promise: "Leave thy fatherless children and let thy widows trust in me: I will preserve them alive, saith the Lord." My brethren of the laity will, I trust, excuse this plain, brief reference to a *homely* topic: its introduction seemed necessary to complete the picture of "Ministerial perplexities." For the truth of the picture we refer them to clergymen generally, and their wives and widows in particular. If they think it too darkly shaded, they can easily relieve it.

My Brethren of the Clergy! I have thus imperfectly set before you some of the perplexities of our profession. I am sure I have only been the oracle of your experience. To the arbitrament of that experience I am content to leave my testimony; I have no fears but it will be substantially endorsed, and thought rather underdrawn, than overcharged.

And now, if this were all of ministerial life, then were we "of all men most miserable." Had we only "perplexities" to talk of, our cause were desperate. But, thanks be to God, there is another and a different chapter in ministerial history: "We are perplexed, but not in despair." This brings us briefly to dwell upon

II. *Our Ministerial Solaces.* Of *all* "who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them," the Apostle says that "they have *strong consolation*." How much more is this true of those, who, "truly called" and "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them this office and ministration, are serving God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people." The Saviour's promise of His presence, through the Paraclete and Comforter, was richly fulfilled to his Apostles. And for us, as for them, it is written: "I will not leave you comfort-

less." Let us barely glance at some of our consolations. We here mention,

I. *The Master's promise and presence.* "Lo, I am with you alway:" that promise stands for ever sure; and so does that other promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee." He was with Moses in Egypt and in the wilderness: with Paul in the Roman prison; with Elijah in the cave, and with Daniel in the lions' den. He will be with *us* also, "an high priest not untouched with our infirmities," to guide us by His Spirit, to uphold us by His grace, to "defend us by His most gracious and ready help."

2. Another of our solaces lies *in the Ministrations of the Spirit.* This is "the unction from the Holy One, whereby we know all things." He "giveth us a right judgment in all things;" "takes of the things that are Christ's and showeth them unto us;" gives efficacy to our testimony; multiplies the seals of our ministry, comforts us in the absence of visible success, by the thought that "we did what we could."

3. Again: Let it comfort us, *that amid all our perplexities, the Rule of our duty is plain, unchanging and infallible.* Amidst the labyrinth of opinions and claims, where path crosses path, there goes before us—as before Israel in the wilderness—a pillar of light and of fire, "the word of the Lord which endureth forever;" and from it, as by "a voice from the excellent glory," the command is heard: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream, but he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." Neither expediency, in its popular sense, nor popular opinion in its fickleness and caprice; neither the pliant spirit of the age, nor the tortuous policy of a man-fearing, world-accommodating spirit, is to be our guide:

all these are "wandering stars to which is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." But "the entrance of God's word giveth light." Synods and Councils have erred. Doctors and Professors may "darken counsel by multiplying words." Bishops and Archbishops may "make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience." Creeds and Symbols may "strain gnats and swallow camels." But he who "calling no man master upon earth," follows where God's lively oracles lead, "shall be quiet from fear of evil."

4. Once more: Let the reflection comfort us, that *the Standard of our Reward will not so much be our Success, as our Fidelity.* "*Who*, then, is that *faithful* and wise steward?" is the Master's great inquiry. Faithful in our duty, and wise in winning souls, we shall "come again rejoicing and bring our sheaves with us." Working earnestly, zealously and "according to the ability which God giveth," "*pro Deo, pro Ecclesia, pro hominum Salute*,"* we may, like the Apostles, "eat our meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and finding favor with the people." Our names may be unknown to fame; but they shall be enrolled in heaven. Admiring crowds may not throng around our pulpits; but in the absence of these pulpit-epicures we may find what is far better—souls "like new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word." No large accessions may grace our Parish Records. St. Paul laboured long and hard ere he saw much fruit. St. John preached for scores of years, ere he wrote: "I have no greater joy, than to hear, that my children walk in the truth." Our Saviour's ministry produced no immediate striking success.

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* "For God, the Church, and men's Salvation."

Augustus Hermann Francke for years prayed "but for one soul."

Whatever, Beloved Brethren, be our perplexities—"let us hold fast our profession" and "cast not away our confidence." With David let us ever say, in faith and hope: "*In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul.*" Upward and onward ever in the path of duty, we shall go safe and happy;

> "For God shall guard where God shall lead."

With this confidence, "we will give ourselves continually unto prayer and the ministry of the word." "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear Him."

And ye, Beloved Brethren of the Laity, remember our manifold infirmities, perplexities and trials. Pray for us. Feel for us. Be just to our virtues, and candid towards our faults. We claim no perfection; for "we bear this treasure in earthen vessels." Let us "bear one another's burthen, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

And we, Beloved Brethren in the Ministry, patiently enduring our "Ministerial Perplexities," and thankfully accepting our "Ministerial Solaces"—will be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"—

> "Till all our labours done,
> And all our conflicts past,
> We shall behold our victory won,
> And stand complete at last."

"He that reapeth, gathereth wages, so that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." Amen.